

The War with Mexico

One American's Story

Henry Clay sneered, "Who is **James K. Polk**?" Clay had just learned the name of the Democratic candidate who would run against him for president in 1844. However, Polk wasn't a complete unknown. He had served seven terms in Congress.

Polk was committed to national expansion. He vowed to annex Texas and take over Oregon. Americans listened and voted. When the votes were counted, Clay had his answer. James Knox Polk was the eleventh president of the United States. On the question of Texas, Polk said:

PRIMARY SOURCE

“To Texas, the reunion is important, because the strong protecting arm of our Government would be extended over her, and the vast resources of her fertile soil and genial climate would be speedily developed.”

—James K. Polk, *Inaugural Address*, 1845

Polk's ideas about expanding the country captured the attention of Americans. After his election Polk looked for ways to act on his agenda.



James Polk's presidential campaign emphasized expansion of the United States.

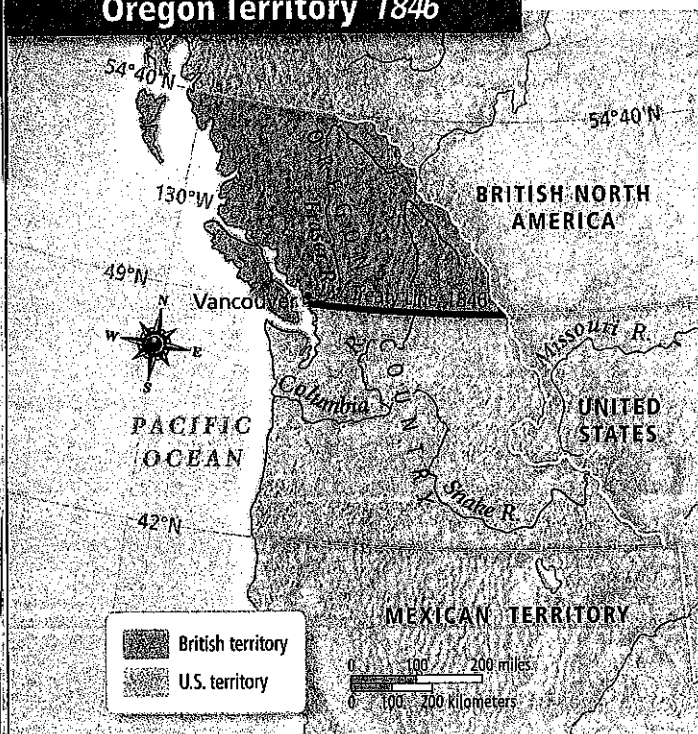
Americans Support Manifest Destiny

KEY QUESTION How did belief in manifest destiny lead to friction overseas?

Land in the West held great promise for Americans. Although populated by Native Americans and Mexicans, American settlers viewed those lands as unoccupied. And Americans worried about claims by other nations.

Dispute over Oregon One country with whom the United States faced conflict was Great Britain. The United States and Britain shared control of the northwest Oregon Territory. Many Americans believed that it was their fate, or destiny, to expand the United States across the continent from ocean to ocean. In 1845, a newspaper editor, John O'Sullivan, gave a name to that belief. He called it **manifest destiny**.

Oregon Territory 1846



Connect Geography & History

- 1. Movement** Why was Oregon an attractive destination for settlers moving west?
- 2. Compare** Refer to the map of Trails West on p. 421. How did the Oregon Trail contribute to the course of manifest destiny?

John O'Sullivan used the word *manifest* to mean *clear* or *obvious*. The word *destiny* means events sure to happen. Therefore, manifest destiny suggested that expansion was not only good but bound to happen—even if it meant pushing Mexicans and Native Americans out of the way.

PRIMARY SOURCE

“Our manifest destiny [is] to overspread the continent allotted [given] by Providence [God] for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”

—John O'Sullivan, *the Annals of America*, Vol 7

Since 1818, Oregon had been occupied jointly by the United States and Britain. By the 1840s, thousands of American settlers had moved into the Oregon Territory. In his campaign, Polk promised to take over all of Oregon. “Fifty-four forty or fight!” was one of his slogans. The parallel of 54°40'N latitude was the northern boundary of the shared Oregon Territory. After Polk's election in 1844, manifest destiny became government policy. The term “manifest destiny” was new, but not the idea.

Rather than fight for all of Oregon, however, Polk settled for half. In 1846, the United States

and Great Britain agreed to divide Oregon at the 49th parallel. This agreement extended the boundary line already drawn between Canada and the United States. Today this line still serves as the border between much of the United States and Canada.

Troubles with Mexico Polk had good reason for settling with Britain over Oregon. By 1846, he had bigger troubles brewing with Mexico over Texas. In 1845, Congress admitted Texas as a slave state, despite Northern objections to the spread of slavery. However, Mexico still claimed Texas as its own. Mexico angrily viewed this **annexation**, or attachment, as an act of war.

To make matters worse, Texas and Mexico could not agree on the official border between them. Texas claimed the Rio Grande, a river south of San Antonio, as its southern boundary. Mexico insisted on the Nueces (noo•AY•sis) River (See the map on page 435.) as the Texas border. The difference in the distance between the two rivers was more than 100 miles at some points. Many thousands of square miles of territory were at stake.

Mexico said it would fight to defend its claim. Polk sent John Slidell, a Spanish-speaking ambassador, to offer Mexico up to \$30 million for Texas, California, and New Mexico. But Slidell's diplomacy failed.

▲ **SEQUENCE EVENTS** Explain how belief in manifest destiny led to friction overseas.

The War with Mexico

KEY QUESTION What events led to war with Mexico?

Giving up on diplomacy, Polk's next strategy was to force the issue. He purposefully ordered General **Zachary Taylor** to station 3,500 troops on the north bank of the Rio Grande, which was part of the disputed territory.

Polk Urges War On April 25, 1846, a Mexican unit crossed the Rio Grande and ambushed an American patrol. Polk sent a rousing war message to Congress, saying, "Mexico . . . has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil." Two days later, Congress declared war. The War with Mexico had begun.

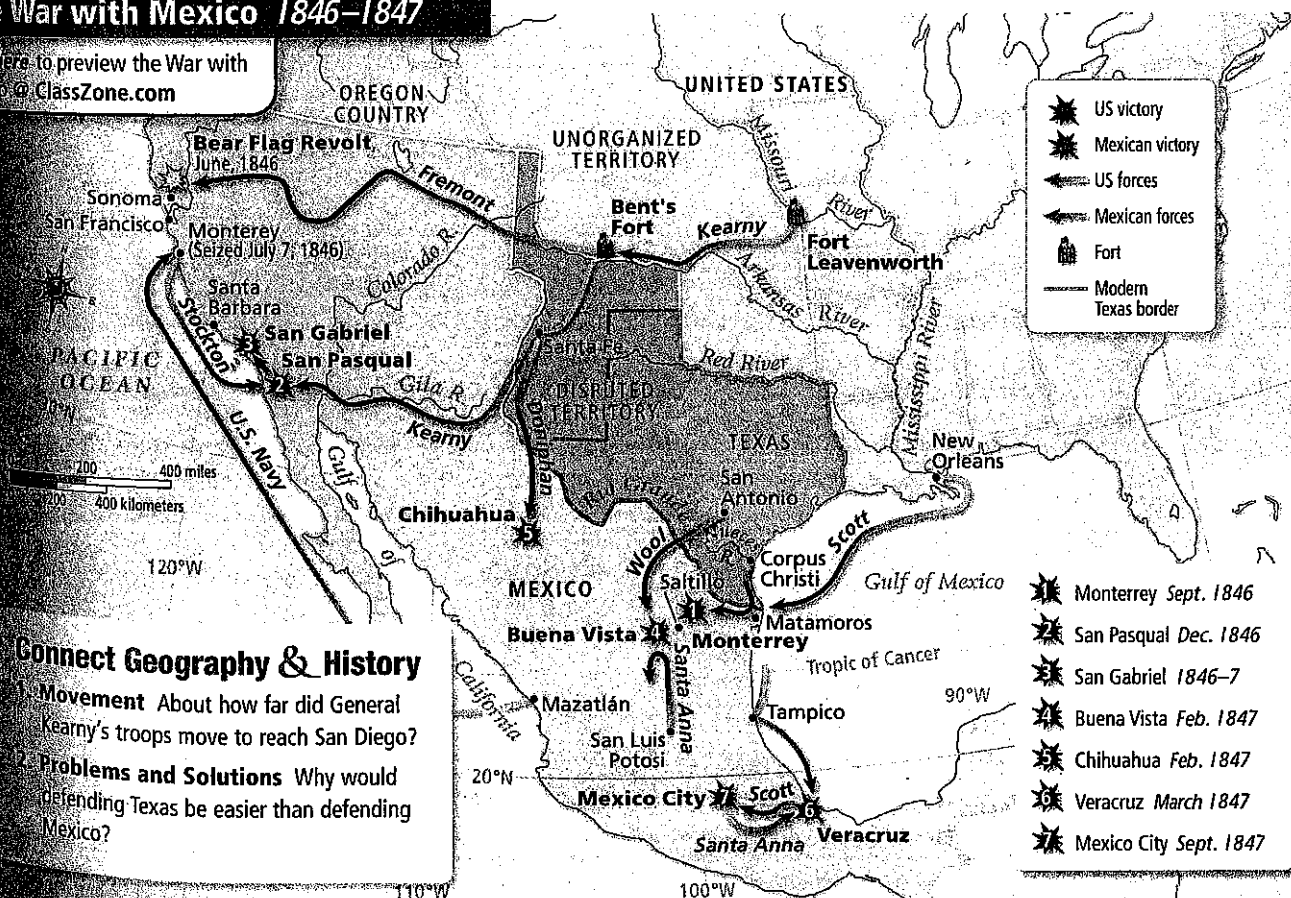
Americans had mixed reactions to the war. In general, Southerners wanted to extend the territory open to slavery, while Northerners feared the expansion of slavery. Many also questioned the justice of men dying for territorial gain. Despite opposition, the United States plunged into war. In May 1846, General Zachary Taylor led troops into Mexico.

Capturing New Mexico and California Not long after the war began, U.S. General Stephen Kearny (KAHR•nee) left Kansas with orders to occupy New Mexico. Once there, Kearny persuaded the Mexican troops that he would withdraw. He took New Mexico without firing a shot. Then Kearny marched on to what is now California, which had fewer than 12,000 Mexican residents. The remainder of the force moved south toward Mexico.

Animated GEOGRAPHY

The War with Mexico 1846–1847

Go here to preview the War with Mexico @ ClassZone.com



Connect Geography & History

- Movement** About how far did General Kearny's troops move to reach San Diego?
- Problems and Solutions** Why would defending Texas be easier than defending Mexico?

Connecting History

Not all war declarations have been as contentious as the war against Mexico. Representative Jeanette Rankin of Montana, the first woman in Congress and an avowed pacifist, was the only member of the House to vote against World War II.

Meanwhile, Americans in northern California staged a revolt and raised a crude flag featuring a grizzly bear. The revolt, known as the **Bear Flag Revolt**, was joined by explorer John C. Frémont. The rebels declared independence from Mexico and formed the Republic of California. U.S. troops joined forces with the rebels. Within weeks, American forces controlled all of California.

The Fighting in Mexico The defeat of Mexico proved more difficult. American forces invaded Mexico from two directions. Taylor battled his way south from Texas toward Monterrey in northern Mexico. On February 23, 1847, his 4,800 troops met Santa Anna's 15,000 Mexican soldiers near a ranch called Buena Vista. After two bloody days of fighting, Santa Anna retreated. The war in the north of Mexico was over.

In southern Mexico, Winfield Scott's forces landed at Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico and made for Mexico City. Outside the capital, the Americans met fierce resistance. But Mexico City fell to Scott in September 1847. America had won the War with Mexico.

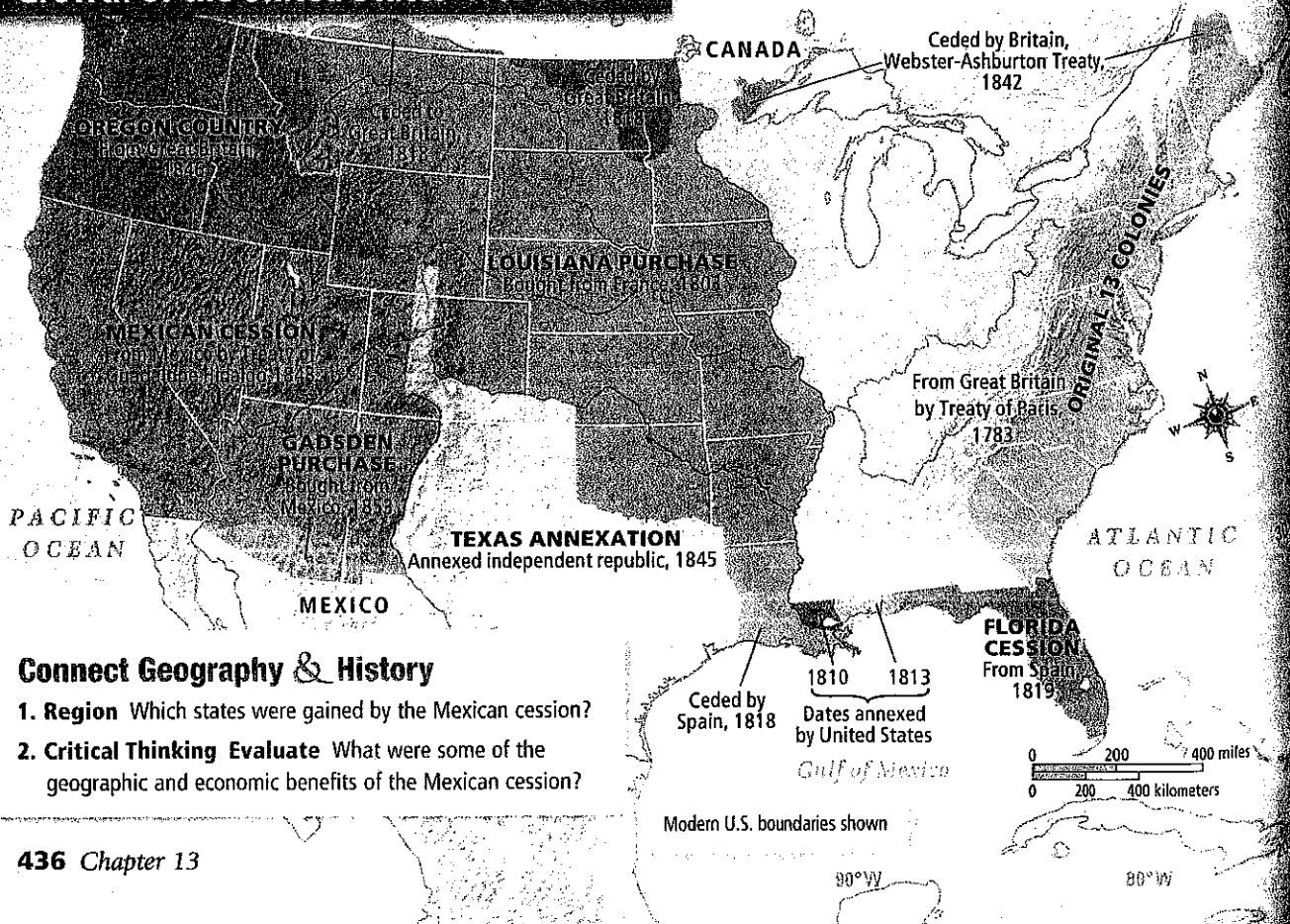
▲ **SEQUENCE EVENTS** Explain the events that led to the war with Mexico.

Impact of Victory

▼ **KEY QUESTION** What Mexican territory had the United States gained by 1853?

For Mexico, the war marked an ugly milestone in its relations with the United States. For the United States, the end of the war meant the fulfillment of manifest destiny—expansion of the nation from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Growth of the United States 1783–1853



Connect Geography & History

1. **Region** Which states were gained by the Mexican cession?
2. **Critical Thinking Evaluate** What were some of the geographic and economic benefits of the Mexican cession?

From Sea to Shining Sea In February 1848, the war ended with the **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** (gwah•duh•LOOP•ay hih•DAHL•go). The loss was a bitter defeat. Many Mexicans felt that the United States had provoked the war in the hope of gaining Mexican territory. In this treaty Mexico

- recognized that Texas was part of the United States
- agreed to the Rio Grande as the border between the two nations
- gave up a vast region known as the **Mexican cession**—including Texas—amounting to almost one-half of present-day Mexico

In return the United States promised to protect the 80,000 Mexicans living in Texas and the Mexican cession. Some Mexicans, however, saw themselves as minorities in a nation with a strange language, culture, and legal system. Others taught new settlers how to develop the land for farming, ranching, and mining. Eventually, a rich new culture resulted from the blend of many cultures.

In 1853, Mexico sold one last strip of land, called the Gadsden Purchase, to the United States for \$10 million. The U.S. wanted the land, now part of southern New Mexico and Arizona, for a southern transcontinental railroad. The United States now stretched “from sea to shining sea.”



Frederic Remington painted this colorful portrait of a Mexican cowboy, A *Vaquero*, in the late nineteenth century.

▲ **SUMMARIZE** Describe the territory the United States gained from Mexico by 1853.



Section Assessment



ONLINE QUIZ

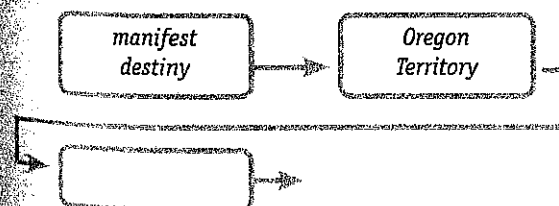
For test practice, go to
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TERMS & NAMES

1. Explain the importance of
 - James K. Polk
 - manifest destiny
 - Zachary Taylor
 - Bear Flag Revolt
 - Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
 - Mexican cession

USING YOUR READING NOTES

2. **Sequence Events** Complete the diagram you started at the beginning of this section.



KEY IDEAS

3. Why did Britain and Mexico oppose American expansion?
4. How did the acquisitions of Oregon and the Mexican cession contribute to manifest destiny?

CRITICAL THINKING

5. **Analyze** Traveling along the Santa Fe Trail, General Kearny and his army sang songs like this one:

“Old Colonel Kearny, you can bet
Will keep the boys in motion,
Till Yankee Land include the sand
On the Pacific Ocean.”

How does this song support the idea of manifest destiny?

6. **Writing Political Cartoon** It is 1853. The Gadsden Purchase has just been completed. Create a political cartoon that comments on America’s belief in manifest destiny.